



Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Member Profile: Margaret Madagame

By Toby Kahn-Loftus, Region 10 Coordinator

Margaret Madagame is an elementary expert that has been working with the Atlanta Community Schools for 27 years. Madagame is a graduate from MSU's 1978 "Internship in Teaching"



program where she taught in a first and second grade combined class during the day and attended her Education methods' classes in the evenings. She had a wonderful internship year and then landed a 5th grade team teaching job at Pinecrest Elementary in the East Lansing Public Schools before migrating to Atlanta to begin her third year of teaching in 1980.

One of Madagame's favorite "best practices" with her first graders is a daily language experience called "Doing

Words," inspired by the work of Katherine Johnson in her 1987 text *Doing Words* (Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Based on the early work of Sylvia Ashton Warner and Lucy Calkins, each school day students write their own words and stories. The words come directly from the students' lived lives. As Madagame shared from Johnson's text: "That is the one rule in the morning, at every level, on every day: you must write a story, you must get a Word." (Johnson, *Doing Words*, page 3)

For Madagame's first graders this is a surefire way to teach natural letter-sound connections—a way to keep their language study grounded in the context of story—each student's own story.

"It seems like I am my students' first outside audience—one of the first adults in their lives to see their written language emerge. I want to handle their first writing attempts with kid gloves—I take it all very seriously. It is critical that I support and celebrate each of my developing writers. As I read in Johnson's book years ago: 'in addition to good writers, we have proud ones, in addition to competent readers we have confident ones. They know they have worth. They learn it through their writing every day.' It's critical, Madagame explained, that I honor each child's literacy development, every day."

Margaret Madagame is pictured in her first grade classroom with two of her smiling, first grade writers: Abby Zajas and Zachary Roux.